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# THE CONFLICT FOR HUMAN LIBERTY

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# THE CONFLICT FOR HUMAN LIBERTY

**T**WO great events there have been in this year so full of hope and ultimate good prospect, that each when it occurred quickened our thoughts, raised our spirits, and even in the terrible strain and anxiety of the present made us look up and look forward to the future with confidence.

One of these events is the Russian Revolution, with which this publication is not concerned and which is mentioned here very shortly only because it is too important to be passed entirely without notice, and because it is by no means irrelevant to relations between the Allies and the United States. A revolution of the magnitude of the Russian revolution cannot take place without some excesses, some dark days, and a period of great confusion. The effect of this confusion on military action is unfavourable, and we cannot and should not ignore the fact that the strain upon the armies of the other Allies has thereby been greatly increased and their task made harder than ever at one very critical moment of the War. Nevertheless, Russia free may yet become more powerful in the war for freedom and far more helpful in the making of peace than she could ever have been under a reactionary Government. And

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nothing should shake our confidence that in the long run the change in Russia must be a great good, not only for Russia but for Europe, and, indeed, for the world. A free Russia is a splendid increase of freedom in the world, and whatever the immediate and passing effect upon the progress of the War, the future effect upon democracy in Europe and upon international relations generally must be most favourable and of incalculable value and benefit. The other great event is the entry of the United States of America into the War against Prussianized Germany, which is the subject of this publication.

The entry of the United States into the War is a tremendous fact even when considered only in the limited aspect of its direct effect upon the War. Let us consider this aspect by itself first.

Before the War the United States had become potentially the strongest country in the world; not the largest in number of population—China, no doubt, has that superiority—but the strongest, if account is taken of the combined value of numbers, extent of undivided territory, unity of public spirit, power of organization, material resources, and all that goes to make effective strength. During the War the United States has gained in wealth, while the European belligerents—Germany as much as any—have spent strength, and now after three years of war Germany in an advanced state of exhaustion, with all those whom she has attacked still in the field, has to reckon with the United States. One qualification, no doubt, must be made, and it is important. The full strength of the United States is not yet mobilized for war; that

will take time, and it is, therefore, true that their intervention in the War cannot be by military or naval action decisive in a short time; but it is equally true that no conceivable military or naval success of the German arms in Europe could now secure a German peace. Germany cannot get peace and the economic recovery, which she at least as much as the other great European belligerents needs, except on the conditions that the United States may consider essential to their own interests and to the future peace and freedom of the world. It is impossible to get round this fact, and it is not surprising that Germany dare not face it and turns her back upon it that she may not face it, for that is what the organized silence and contempt in Germany of the action of the United States really mean.

But there is another aspect of the entry of the United States into the War that is much greater, of deeper significance and more far-reaching consequence. It is to be seen in the reasons and spirit of the decision taken by the President and the nation. The public utterances of President Wilson when announcing the decision and subsequently are full of it and are inspired by it. The United States have departed from the policy of isolation not from favour to one set of combatants against another, nor even from sympathy with one side against the other, real and strong though the sympathy with some of the Allies has been in large sections of the American people since the outbreak of the War.

This has not been the motive that forced the tremendous national decision, but a growing conviction

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which gradually became settled, deep, and paramount, that this terrible war is a desperate and critical struggle against something evil and intensely dangerous to moral law, to international good faith, to everything that is essential if different nations are to live together in the world in equal freedom and friendship. The will to power—it is a German phrase—has shown in the course of this war that it knows neither mercy, pity, nor limits. Militarism is one quality of it, and it stands for things that all democracies, if they wish to remain free and to be part of a world that is free, must hate.

This conviction and a sense that the old barriers of the world are broken down by modern conditions, that the cause of humanity is one, and that no nation so great and free as the United States could stand aside in this crisis without sacrificing its honour and losing its soul, are—so we believe—the real motive and cause of the decision of the United States. Democracies are reluctant to take such decisions until they are attacked or until their own material interests are directly and deeply involved, and the United States did not take the decision till German action in the War made it imperative; but then they took it with a clearness, an emphasis, and a declaration of principle that will be one of the landmarks and shining examples of all human history.

Comparison may be made between the entry of the United States into the War and that of the British people. There is some resemblance, but there is a difference. The outrageous invasion of Belgium, involving special and separate Treaty obligations, left

Great Britain at the outset no alternative; her decision had to be sudden; the whole people felt at once that there was no honourable way of avoiding war. Articles have been written since to show that the interest of Great Britain was directly involved, that though Belgium and France were attacked she, too, was threatened, and all that is true. Numerous public utterances in Germany since the War began have disclosed that the German purpose was to subject not only Belgium and France, but also Great Britain, to German predominance. But the British people had no time at the outset to consider where their interest lay; had it not been so they would have taken time to consider and to argue, but as things were honour was so clearly and peremptorily challenged, and sympathy so deeply outraged by the initial action of Germany that there was no time for consideration and no place for argument. This it was that made the decision of the British people so practically unanimous, so quick, and so thorough. The decision of the United States was slow and deliberate; it is apparently not less unanimous and thorough, and each decision will have its own impressiveness in history.

On our first entry into the War we were, as the United States now is, free to decide our own part and our own terms of peace. When Japan entered the War the obligation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to make war and peace in common came into effect; then the agreement of September, 1914, made mutual and binding agreements between ourselves and France and Russia, and our position now is that of the other nations who are parties to the agreement of September,

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1914. The United States are independent of that agreement: this is a difference, important and definite, though, I believe, it will be small in practical effect compared with the deep underlying identity of view, principle, and feeling.

President Wilson said the other day that this is a conflict for "human liberty." That is what the Allies have been made by German action in the War to feel more and more deeply, and this feeling is a greater bond of union than anything else. There is one more thing to be added. I was talking the other day to a man who had been some two years at the front and was home for ten days' leave. Of all feelings, those that have the most right to be considered with attention and deference are the feelings of the men who are risking their lives and undergoing the awful trial and suffering of trench warfare. In this man's feeling there was no hatred and no passion; there was great weariness and great longing for the end of the War, but an intense desire to see the War end in such a way that, if he survived, the rest of his life—he is a young man—should be free from war and threats of war. That too, as I understand, is President Wilson's policy and purpose—human liberty and secure peace.

Permanent peace has hitherto been an ideal; will a League of Nations or some concrete proposal of that kind become practicable after this war? Will the ideal come within the limits of practical, effective politics? This is too large a question to be discussed here. My own hope and belief is that it will. This war will bring about a new order of things. In domestic affairs old questions will be swept off the board of politics by new



problems and new questions, to which many of the old phrases, the old formulas and previous points of view will not be applicable, and new men will perhaps be needed to solve the new problems. And in international politics new ideas may prevail, and things hitherto impossible may become possible. How much becomes possible will depend upon the change effected by the experience of this war, not so much in men's heads as in their hearts and feelings, and this we shall not know fully till the millions of men who have fought at the front are settled at home again and take their places in civil and political life in free democracies.

If the result of this war is to destroy in Germany the popularity of war—for before 1914 the prospect of war was popular, at any rate in books that were widely read there without resentment, if not with approval—if war is felt even in Germany to be hateful; if as a result of this war men of all nations will desire in future to stamp out the first sign of war as they would a forest fire or the plague, then the world may have a peace and security that it has never yet known.

If that is not the result, then the lot of mankind in this epoch of its history will be more desperate than in the darkest and most cruel ages, for civilized nations will prepare and perfect the destructive inventions of science, and these will be used to the point of mutual extermination. Militarism and civilization are now incompatible, and nations must attain some greater measure of international self-control than has previously been thought possible if civilization is to progress or even to be preserved.

We hear—and no doubt it is true—that the Ger-

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man people long for peace, but they are not yet masters in their own house; the recent political crisis in Germany produced some change of men, but no evidence of a change of the ruling spirit; the message of the Crown Prince, who seems to have played a leading part in the crisis, ended with something about compelling others to respect the German flag as the *ultima ratio regum*. There was not a word in it about respect for the rights of others. Before the world can rely on the speeches of German Chancellors it must know to whom the German Chancellor is responsible. Is it to the Reichstag, or is it solely to the Emperor? And by whose favour is he chosen and maintained in place? Is it by the Emperor, the Crown Prince, and the Military Command?

We want to be sure that when this war is over Germany will not begin to prepare and to plan for the next war, and there can be no security against that so long as the Prussian military caste is the strongest power in Germany. They will never give up the will to power, and that is incompatible with peace because it is inconsistent with the freedom and equal rights of other nations.

Much has been said about the resolution passed by the Reichstag in July. It is frequently difficult to be sure exactly what Parliamentary resolutions mean. They are often drawn to enable people who do not all mean the same thing to vote together for the same words, and there was apparently not unanimity in Germany as to the exact meaning of the Reichstag resolution.

There are, however, two questions to be asked about

the resolution: (1) Does the German Government endorse it and interpret it in the way in which it is interpreted by those in this country who take the most favourable view of it? (2) Is it to be a principle accepted and acted upon in Germany that the Government, by which is meant the Executive Power, is responsible to the Reichstag? It is quite right that the resolution of the Reichstag should not be ignored; the fact that some resolution of the kind was found necessary or was even permitted has some importance; but until the two questions asked above can be answered clearly and satisfactorily I do not see how discussion of the value to be attached to this resolution of the Reichstag can profitably be carried further.

It might be, no doubt, that if the War ended tomorrow in an inconclusive peace the disappointment and war weariness of the German people would subsequently bring about a real change of power in Germany. Some evidence analcous to Bismarck's disclosure about the draft of the Ems telegram—something, for instance, showing that the ultimatum to Serbia was deliberately made stiff to make war certain—might come to light and reveal to the German people that strings were pulled in Germany in 1914 with fatal effect by persons who desired and intended war; and such revelation coming after the experience of the last three years might be so hateful to the German people as to upset the military caste.

It is possible; but to make peace on this hope would be gambling upon a chance, and the things at stake are too vital and awful for gambling. There is no end

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yet to the official deception and self-deception of the German people about the War, and as long as they ignore or are ignorant of the real facts about the origin of the War and the awful outrages perpetrated by their own Higher Command, particularly in the occupied parts of Belgium and France, for which, in the name of all that is right and just, there must be reparation, so long, it is to be feared, will the German people do nothing of their own initiative to remove the obstacles to peace.

The root of the matter is in President Wilson's words: "A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants. It must be a league of honour and partnership of opinion." Let it be admitted that no such partnership will be complete or secure till Germany fulfils the conditions for it and is included in it; and when it is evident that at a peace conference table the Allies will meet German plenipotentiaries who will accept and share in letter and spirit, and will represent German authority that also accepts and shares in letter and spirit, the views of national policy and the aspirations for the future of the world that are the matter of President Wilson's public declarations, then there will rightly be the strongest movements here and in the Allied countries to discuss peace and to end the terrible destruction of life and all the horrors of war; but till this is so the War is and will remain on the part of the United States and the Allies a defensive war, a war

to defend human liberty and free nations from present and future military aggression.

There is but one other point on which I would touch ; it is the prospective relations between Great Britain and the United States. Mr. Balfour's mission has, we hope, done something to make it felt in the United States that there is real community of ideas, sentiments, and sympathy. This country was fortunate in having Mr. Balfour to represent it on such a mission at such a time, and he very likely did more to promote understanding of us in America than any one else could have done in the time. And the more closely the two people come into contact, the better they get to know each other, the more I believe it will be apparent to each not only that they speak the same language, but that they use it to mean the same things, that they both have the same idea of freedom and liberty, and desire the same sort of world in which to live.

There is no reason in the forms of a Constitutional Monarchy why the British people should not be as free, as truly and thoroughly a democracy, as any republic can be. The American Colonies of the eighteenth century by the War of Independence established not only independence but democracy. The States of Europe, whose internal conditions were then different from those in America, were not yet ready for the same measure of democracy. Russia is only just beginning to establish it, but the change there promises to be thorough. All the other great States of Europe, except Germany (I omit Austria-Hungary because it is more impossible than ever to define the internal conditions of that mixed Empire), are now in form and

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in spirit and in fact democratic. Great Britain has attained it not less surely and thoroughly than others by the processes of political evolution.

In all dealings I have had with Americans, official and unofficial, I have felt that the outlook upon national and individual life was the same. No written agreement is necessary to draw the two nations together or to keep them in friendship; what is needed is that each should continually see in the utterances of representative men, and in the writings of the press, not the eccentricities and the fringe, but the real stuff of national feeling; not the froth and eddies, but the main deep current of public opinion in both countries.

That is what we feel about President Wilson's recent announcements. They satisfy, they carry conviction, they make us feel that we really know what he thinks and why he thinks it and how firmly he grasps it; and we hope that the response from public men and from the press on this side is making the President and people of the United States feel that we really do respond earnestly and truly; that the sentiments and principles expressed by him are ours also, and that in what he has said of this war and of his hopes for the future he has spoken what is also in our minds and hearts.

If the millions of dear lives that have been given in this war are to have been given not in vain, if there is to be any lasting compensation for the appalling suffering of the last three years, the defeat of the Prussian will to power, however it is brought about, will not by itself be enough.

Out of that defeat must come something constructive, some moral change in international relations, and

the entry of the United States of America into the War, in the spirit and with the principles that have inspired their action, is an invaluable and, I trust, a sure and unconquerable guarantee that in the peace and after the peace these hopes will be realized.

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